

Message Text

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ACTION EB-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 EA-11 NEA-14 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00

COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 FMC-04 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01

CG-00 COA-02 DLOS-07 SWF-02 L-03 PM-07 AEC-11 ACDA-19

NSC-07 SCI-06 FEA-02 TRSE-00 DRC-01 /158 W

----- 101630

R 311244Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9558

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION IAEA VIENNA

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRN, ENRG, TECH, PBOR, IMCO, FR

SUBJECT: NUCLEAR MERCHANT SHIPS

REF: STATE 101143, 112169

SUMMARY: THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY
ARE JOINTLY STUDYING THE FEASIBILITY OF NUCLEAR-POWERED
MERCHANT SHIPS WHILE FRENCH SHIPOWNERS COOLNESS AND SHIP-
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BUILDERS CAUTION INDICATE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS WILL REQUIRE

TIME AND HARD WORK TO RESOLVE. FRANCE HAS NOT RATIFIED THE 1962 BRUSSELS CONVENTION BUT ESTABLISHED RULES IN 1965 REGARDING LIABILITY OF OWNERS OF NUCLEAR SHIPS. THE EMBASSY WILL COORDINATE WITH USOECD MISSION THE PARIS VISIT OF US GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH NUCLEAR SHIPPING PROBLEMS.

1. CONSTRUCTION OF AT LEAST ONE NUCLEAR-POWERED MERCHANT VESSEL IS A GOAL OF FRANCE'S SEVENTH PLAN, ANNOUNCED IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, TO REVITALIZE AND TO DOUBLE THE SIZE OF THE FRENCH-FLAG MERCHANT FLEET BY 1980. UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF THE MERCHANT MARINE, A STUDY GROUP HAS BEEN FORMED TO INVESTIGATE THE FEASIBILITY OF NUCLEAR PROPULSION FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF MERCHANT SHIPS, I.E., SUPERTANKERS, CONTAINERSHIPS AND GAS TRANSPORTERS, AND TO DETERMINE IF THE LIGHT WATER PRESSURIZED REACTORS PRESENTLY USED ABOARD FRENCH SUBMARINES CAN BE EVOLVED INTO PROPULSION UNITS FOR MERCHANT SHIPS. THE STUDY GROUP CONSISTS OF EXPERTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF THE MERCHANT MARINE, THE COMMISSARIAT FOR ATOMIC ENERGY, THE TECHNICAL OFFICE FOR SHIP CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARMY MINISTRY, FRAMATOME, AN AFFILIATE OF WESTINGHOUSE/CREUSOT-LOIRE, AND THREE PRINCIPAL FRENCH SHIPYARDS: CHANTIER DE L'ATLANTIQUE (ST. NAZAIRE) CHANTIER DE FRANCE (DUNKIRK) AND CHANTIER NAVALS DE LA CIOTAT.

2. WHILE FRANCE HAS YET TO BUILD AND OPERATE A NUCLEAR-POWERED MERCHANT VESSEL, IT HAS SOME PRIOR EXPERIENCE IN STUDYING THE SUBJECT. IN 1971 IT WAS PROPOSED THAT THE PREDOMINANTLY GOVERNMENT-OWNED COMPAGNIE MESSAGERIES MARITIMES OPERATE A NUCLEAR-POWERED CONTAINERSHIP, BUT STUDIES CONCLUDED THIS WAS NOT ECONOMICAL AND THE VESSEL ("KORRIGAN") WAS SUBSEQUENTLY BUILT WITH CONVENTIONAL PROPULSION. IT IS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE COST OF BUILDING A NUCLEAR SHIP WOULD BE THIRTY TO FORTY PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE COST OF BUILDING ITS CONVENTIONAL COUNTERPART BUT IT IS THOUGHT THAT IN VIEW OF PRESENT FOSSIL FUEL COSTS THAT NUCLEAR POWER CAN BE ECONOMICAL BOTH IN TERMS OF VESSEL OPERATION COSTS AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRODUCTIVITY.

3. FRENCH SHIPOWNERS, AS THEIR CONCERTED OPINIONS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED RECENTLY THROUGH THE FRENCH SHIPOWNERS ASSOCIATION, APPEAR TO BE LESS ENTHUSIASTIC THAN THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ABOUT NUCLEAR MERCHANT SHIPS; THEY HAVE EMPHASIZED THE PROBLEMS PECULIAR TO OPERATING SUCH VESSELS RATHER THAN ANY BENEFITS THAT MIGHT RESULT. THE

SHIPOWNERS ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE UNWILLINGNESS OF CERTAIN COUNTRIES TO OPEN THEIR PORTS TO NUCLEAR SHIPS, THE PROBABLE HIGH COST OF INSURANCE, SHIP SAFETY, THE PRICE OF NUCLEAR FUEL, AND MOST INTERESTINGLY, THEY ARE WORRIED ABOUT BEING RESTRICTED TO FRENCH SOURCES FOR MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY. RECENT EMBASSY CONTACTS WITH SOME OF THE FRENCH SHIPYARD OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN THE NUCLEAR STUDY GROUP ALSO INDICATE THAT THE INITIAL ENTHUSIASM AND GRANDIOSE PRONOUNCEMENTS CONCERNING THE NUCLEAR MERCHANT SHIP PROJECT HAVE GIVEN WAY TO A MORE CAUTIOUS AND REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT AS ONE THAT WILL REQUIRE LONG AND HARD WORK BEFORE ANY RESULTS ARE REALIZED.

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4. FRANCE HAS NOT RATIFIED THE 1962 BRUSSELS CONVENTION ON LIABILITY OF OPERATORS OF MERCHANT SHIPS AND WE CANNOT DETERMINE THEIR PRESENT ATTITUDE ON THIS SUBJECT SINCE THE RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL HAS BEEN ON OVERSEAS TRAVEL AND WILL NOT RETURN UNTIL AFTER YOUR JUNE 3 DEADLINE. THE FRENCH ACT OF NOV. 12, 1965 LAID DOWN RULES ON THE LIABILITY OF OPERATORS OF NUCLEAR SHIPS SIMILAR TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE STIPULATIONS OF THE 1962 BRUSSELS CONVENTION AND THIS ACT APPLIES BOTH TO SHIPS REGISTERED IN FRANCE AND TO VISITING SHIPS. THE MAXIMUM LIABILITY AND THE AMOUNT OF FINANCIAL GUARANTEE IS FIXED AT ABOUT 100 MILLION DOLLARS, BUT FOR FOREIGN SHIPS THIS LIABILITY COULD BE HIGHER IF SO PROVIDED BY THE LEGISLATION OF THE COUNTRY OF REGISTRATION, EXCEPT IF OTHERWISE AGREED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THAT COUNTRY. UNDER A DECREE OF JUNE 19, 1969 ACCESS OF NUCLEAR SHIPS TO FRENCH TERRITORIAL WATERS MAY BE REFUSED IN THE ABSENCE OF THE MINIMUM GUARANTEE REQUIRED BY THE LAW. APPLICATION OF AN AUTHORIZATION MUST BE MADE TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

5. THE EMBASSY WILL BE HAPPY TO COORDINATE THE FORTHCOMING VISIT TO FRANCE OF MR. BANK AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WITH THE U.S. MISSION TO OECD. IT IS SUGGESTED THAT THE VISITORS MEET WITH TWO FRENCH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF THE MERCHANT MARINE, M. DIVAN, WHO IS A SPECIAL ADVISOR ON TECHNICAL NUCLEAR SHIPPING MATTERS AND WHO HEADS THE NUCLEAR STUDY GROUP, AND M. DOUAY, WHO IS GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE MERCHANT MARINE SECRETARIAT AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS OF NUCLEAR MERCHANT SHIPPING.

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